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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002273

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/01/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [RP](#)  
SUBJECT: ANATOMY OF AN EXTRA-JUDICIAL KILLING

REF: MANILA 2193 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Acting Pol/C Joseph L. Novak for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: During POL team's recent visit to Puerto Princesa, the capital of Palawan in the western Philippines, contacts expressed their deep concern about the brazen daytime killing of a well-known radio broadcaster and former politician on May 22. GRP authorities arrested a serving member of the local police force for the killing, but many contacts assert that the Puerto Princesa mayor, a political opponent of the victim's, probably orchestrated the attack. The slaying has clearly bred anger, fear and cynicism in Palawan, highlighting in a microcosm the damage done by extra-judicial killings on a national scale. End Summary.

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Brazen Killing in Palawan  
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12. (U) Acting Pol/C and Senior POL LES visited Puerto Princesa, the capital of Palawan, a large island located in the western Philippines, May 24-26. During the visit, many contacts expressed their deep concern about the killing of popular radio broadcaster Fernando "Dong" Batul on May 22 (see reftel). Batul was killed on the way to work by several gunmen in downtown Puerto Princesa in broad daylight as his car rolled over a speed bump. Contacts told Acting Pol/C that Batul, 36, was one of the most famous people in Palawan -- an area with about one million people -- due to his popular morning radio show on station DYPR called "Bastonero" (meaning "one who whips"), which ran hard-hitting exposes on political subjects and alleged corruption. He had also served as vice mayor of Puerto Princesa from 2001-03.

13. (C) Catholic Bishop Pedro Arigo told Acting Pol/C on May 25 that he was "a good friend" of the slain broadcaster. Batul, he said, had feared for his life in recent months after receiving several threatening letters demanding that he end his radio show. Batul did not reveal the full contents of the letters, but he indicated that some were linked to his on-air interview with a local leader of the communist New People's Army (NPA). A couple of weeks ago, Bishop Arigo related, two unexploded grenades were found near Batul's home (where Batul, who was unmarried, lived with his mother). Feeling that he was in danger, Batul planned to go on break soon to Baguio City, but was killed before doing so. Gertie Anda, the head of the Palawan Environmental Legal Assistance Center, told Acting Pol/C on May 25 that she was also a friend of Batul's and had had "many nightmares" since his killing. Noting that there had not been many such killings in Palawan in the past, Anda remarked that "many people are now afraid that they could be targeted and killed, too."

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Blaming the Mayor  
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14. (C) Many contacts blamed Mayor Edward Hagedorn, a long-time politician with a thuggish image, for the killing. The allegations about Hagedorn started almost immediately after the slaying when Batul's mother and sisters turned up at the murder site and began to shout that Hagedorn was responsible. Anda noted that Hagedorn has been a political opponent of Batul's and the subject of frequent criticism from Batul on his radio program. Anda theorized (as did other interlocutors) that Hagedorn (who is said to be very thin-skinned) may have been so angered by the criticism that he ordered the killing. During a May 25 meeting, Joel R. Reyes, the Governor of Palawan and a political opponent of Hagedorn's, claimed that he had information which "might establish" a link between Hagedorn and the killing, noting that a police officer arrested for the crime (see below) had served as a bodyguard for Hagedorn.

15. (C) Concerns about Hagedorn's alleged involvement has also drifted down to the public, with drivers of three-wheeler taxis holding an anti-Hagedorn "noise barrage" on May 24, while a crowd gathered at the main Catholic Church denounced the attack and offered prayers for the victim. Two businessmen told Acting Pol/C that "even if Hagedorn is not proven to be linked to the crime, his political position has been seriously damaged due to the suspicion."

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Arrest of Policeman  
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16. (SBU) In response to the press outcry over the killing, Malacanang announced on May 24 that the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) was taking the lead in the criminal investigation. On May 25, the NBI announced that it had arrested Aaron Golifardo, an active duty member of the Puerto Princesa Philippine National Police (PNP) force. The NBI had arrested Golifardo on May 24 in Manila, where he had allegedly flown right after committing the crime on May 22. According to press reports, Golifardo had a long record of infractions while a member of the PNP and had even been linked to a murder in 2002. In allegedly killing Batul, Golifardo reportedly may have been motivated by negative comments that Batul had made about him on his radio program. Golifardo is currently incarcerated in the NBI's jail facility in Puerto Princesa after being formally charged with the crime on May 25. The NBI has announced that its investigation is continuing and that it is trying to track down other perpetrators of the attack. In meetings with GRP officials in Puerto Princesa, Acting Pol/C underscored the need for a full investigation of the crime, and the arrest and trial of all perpetrators.

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Comment  
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17. (C) Batul was a well-known and well-liked figure, and his slaying has clearly roiled Palawan. While many contacts believe that the local mayor is linked to the crime (a view that involves conjecture), they do not believe he will face serious scrutiny because of his influence, which includes a close relationship with Malacanang. This has bred cynicism toward the political and legal system. Batul's slaying highlights in a microcosm the damage done by extra-judicial killings on a national scale in the Philippines. Very few suspects have been caught and prosecuted for the rash of killings of leftist activists, journalists, and alleged criminals over recent years. This, in turn, has led to serious questions about the rule of law and the fairness and effectiveness of the country's law enforcement system.

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Kenney